

Abstract

THESIS: A Descriptive Study on Communicating about Cancer Online: Utilizing Communication for Information and Support in an Online Environment

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People with a chronic illness like cancer often use the Internet to participate in online health discussions and connect with people with similar medical conditions through an online community. The purpose of this study was to explore how people affected by cancer utilize communication in an online community to access information, advice, and support. This research examines the messages of a discussion forum within an online cancer community using content and thematic analyses. This study finds that people within an online cancer community (1) give/seek information more often than they give/seek emotional support, (2) give information and emotional support more than they seek them, and (3) utilize storytelling within a majority of messages.

Keywords: cancer, online community, online cancer community, cancer-related online community